

Beat BACK PAIN

From lifting heavy objects to overexerting yourself in the gym, it's dangerously easy to injure your back. Liz Alvis finds out some prevention tips from the experts

TRIGGER POINT

Over-exercising

Feeling a few twinges after your latest gym session? You could be overstraining your lower back or performing exercises that are too advanced for you, says osteopath Cameron Reid (cameronreid.com).

"Your lower back is at the crossroads of your body and all movements go through it, so make sure the level and type of exercise is appropriate for you," he advises.

"The most common reason people get back injuries while exercising is they increase their exercise regime too steeply and their body has not developed enough yet," says Cameron.

"If you have not exercised for a while then build up your regime slowly, increasing by 10 per cent a week. This gives your body time to adapt and strengthen. Do not exercise every day at the start, instead aim for once to twice a week with three rest days in between. Warming up wakens your nervous system which helps you maintain good posture and body co-ordination; that way you are less likely to over-stretch yourself."



PREVENTION TIPS

"It isn't so much strengthening your back but using it that will help prevent further injury," Cameron advises. "Walk more and try to incorporate stairs or hills. Push off with your feet when walking, and hold your stomach muscles in a little. This activates your back supporting muscles. Your hip muscles support you so squats and lunges are excellent strengtheners for your lower back too."

TRIGGER POINT

Slumping at your desk

Sitting down at a desk all day is not good news for our backs. "Our bodies are designed to move little and often; we are not meant to be sitting down for eight to 12 hours a day," says physiotherapist Sammy Margo. "As a result of this sedentary lifestyle we are causing 'micro trauma' to our bodies. Over a prolonged period of time this may result in back, neck and shoulder pain and repetitive strain injury."

And if you tend to slump in your seat, you're causing further damage, as this will cause some muscle groups to become long and weak, whereas

others will become short and tight. Sammy explains: "If you are sitting in a slumped fashion the lower back muscles will become elongated whilst the stomach muscles will become weakened. The muscles around your shoulders will lengthen and the muscles on the front of your body, your pectorals, are going to become shorter. As a result you have an imbalance in the body."

PREVENTION TIPS

Sammy recommends taking regular breaks throughout the day. "Have a walk in your lunch hour," she suggests. "Don't ring your colleagues in the next office – get up and speak to them instead. Use the photocopier at the other end of the office." Ask your boss for a workspace assessment to ensure your desk is set up correctly. "The top of your screen should be at your eye level," says Sammy, "and the screen should be arm's length away. Make sure your mouse is placed where your knife would be when you are eating at the dinner table instead of where the glass would be."